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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran America's Darfur
Policy Russia's Energy Strategy
PARIS - Tuesday, May 09, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
America's Darfur Policy
Russia's Energy Strategy

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Iran and the "unprecedented Iranian initiative" (Le Figaro) calling on President Bush to a dialogue is today's lead international story, which Liberation interprets as "An Atom of Contact Between Iran and the U.S." Both Le Figaro and Liberation devote their editorials to the story: "America Must Talk to Iran" says Pierre Rousselin in Le Figaro, who, compares this opportunity to the U.S. opening with China or with the former Soviet Union, adds: "the existence of the letter is as important as its content. Iran's request mirrors past gestures to divide the West., making it very hard for the U.S. President to say yes to a dialogue." The Liberation editorial suggests: "International impotence is at its maximum. Collaborative cooperation is close to zero. The only trump card remaining may be that of a dialogue. Yesterday, the Iranian President took that road. A daring suggestion that merits attention." Les Echos's analysis sees Europe as being 'caught in the trap of Iran's nuclear crisis.' (See Part C)

The domestic lead story continues to be the Clearstream scandal as Le Figaro comments on its front page: "A Decisive Week for Villepin." Le Figaro notes that the weekend was rich in rumors of the PM's resignation, despite efforts to quell "the campaign of rumors." Le Figaro also reports that "Sarkozy's friends continue to fuel the hypothesis of his taking over as PM." But in an editorial, Liberation asks: "What would be the advantage for Sarkozy to go to Matignon (the Prime Minister's Office) if it means losing the Elysee Palace?" Meanwhile an analysis in Liberation emphasizes that "support for PM Villepin among his own people, both in the government and the National Assembly, is waning."

The nomination of General Michael Hayden to head the CIA is widely reported. For Le Figaro, his nomination is "but the second part of a two-prong strategy by President Bush. who is naming a master spy to the job." For Philippe Gelie "this latest revolution at Langley is but a sign of other deeper changes to come for an agency in crisis. and held responsible for a long series of failures, starting with 9/11 and the Iraqi WMD." According to Liberation's report, "no official explanation was given for Porter Goss's surprise resignation."

Several media outlets report on Moussaoui's request for a second trial, "now that he knows he can be tied fairly," and in which he would "plead not guilty because he 'knew nothing.'"

Le Monde devotes its editorial to Darfur and this weekend's agreement in Abuja, "a witness to America's determination." (See Pat C)

Liberation comments on an op-ed penned by the Russian Minister for Energy, Viktor Khristenko, published in the Financial Times over the weekend: "The Russian Minister says he is 'perplexed over the persisting western criticism which gives a negative image of Russia's energy policy.' Without ever naming him, Khristenko is answering the criticism made last Thursday by the U.S. Vice-President in Vilnius. But the tension is far from falling: the U.S. President's interview in Bild stressed his concern over the 'economic nationalism' at work in Russia." Les Echos also comments on the President's interview in the German daily Bild: "Washington accuses Moscow of using its energy for 'political purposes.'" (See Part C)
Le Figaro reports on the World Bank's warnings to the Quartet that "the suspension of financial aid could lead to the Palestinian Authority's demise." An accompanying report

tells the story of "hounded Palestinians forced to sell their jewelry to survive." La Croix carries a report noting that the EU Commissioner Benita Ferreo-Waldner has said that the EU is seeking a way to send money to help the Palestinian people "which points to the difficult situation that the EU is in since it decided to suspend financial aid to the Palestinian Authority." One French diplomat is quoted saying that the EU has "fallen into the trap" laid out by the U.S. and now finds itself in a "grotesque situation"

Liberation carries a two-page report entitled "America's Best Friends." "Since the protest against America's intervention in Iraq, French intellectuals, including journalists, appalled by the ambient anti-Americanism, have founded an association, 'The Circle of the Oratory,' which gets its inspiration from the neo-cons and those who flog radical Islamism. They meet regularly in a Parisian Protestant Temple. All of its members would like to see the French become friendlier towards their American cousins. Says one member, Michel Taubman: 'The Americans are not our enemies, even if we can criticize them. But I am worried about living in a world where America would be weakened.'"

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"America Must Speak to Iran"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/09): "In its tug of war with the international community, Tehran has always tried to divide the adversary. Pitting the Americans, Europeans Chinese and Russians against each other is the best way to protect Iran against international sanctions. On the eve of the UN talks, the letter sent to President Bush has the same goal. While the terms of the letter are probably not all kind for the U.S. President, the letter marks a beginning. Its existence is as important as its content. On a tactical level, the letter shows that Iran is ready to open a direct dialogue with the U.S. Strategically speaking, the letter shows that Iran wants Washington to grant it recognition, despite having listed it in the 'axis of evil.' Because of his past messages of destruction, Ahmadinejad is making it very difficult for President Bush to respond to the call for talks. Yet, despite Iran's unacceptable declarations, America must speak to Iran. For many reasons, including the fact that a military option against Iran would be even more hazardous than the intervention in Iraq. Direct contact between Washington and Tehran would help to reinforce the fragile international consensus. Past examples, although very different - China, the Soviet Union - prove that daring can serve peace. The time has come to test Iran's capacity for dialogue."

"A New World"

Pierre Haski in left-of-center Liberation (05/09): "International impotence is at its maximum. The Iranian nuclear crisis has crystallized the fact that what is commonly called the 'international community' is incapable of collective action. An agreement between the Americans, the Europeans, the Chinese and the Russians is practically impossible: each defends different positions for political or economic reasons. While everyone agrees on the goal, everyone disagrees on the means. There is no single good solution on the table: a diplomatic impasse, inoperative sanctions, a hazardous military operation. The only trump card that remains and which has yet to be tested is that of a direct dialogue between Washington and Tehran... The idea that an out to the crisis may reside in an approach similar to Nixon's trip to China is beginning to take hold: although daring, the option merits thought."

"Europe in the Nuclear Trap"

Jacques Hubert-Rodier in right-of-center Les Echos (05/09): "Side by side with the Iranian nuclear crisis what is being played out is the re-positioning of the U.S., China and Russia on the international scene, which could leave Europe behind. Against Iran, Europe does not hold the right cards, which are held by Washington. A high French official recently suggested that 'the time for dialogue between Washington and Tehran may have come.' This suggestion is unacceptable for Washington because, according to Nick Burns, dialogue with a country that threatens everyone is impossible. In this Iranian trap, the European Troika may well carry less weight than the U.S., Russia or China."

America's Darfur Policy

"Hope in Darfur"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (05/09): "No one can say whether the partial agreement reached in Darfur will succeed. But its signing, after a five-day Marathon led by Assistant Secretary Robert Zoellick stands witness to America's determination in Darfur. The Americans, who are mired in Iraq and who have characterized the situation

in Darfur as a 'genocide,' cannot afford to be held responsible for a new humanitarian scandal. After months of dilly-dallying, probably because of Washington's desire to preserve its relationship with Sudan, a major partner in its war against terrorism, America has proven it can weigh in concretely for peace. The fear of instability, fueled by Chad, where the U.S. has oil interests may have played a role. Still, the agreement has already had a positive effect: Khartoum does not exclude the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops. But this dynamic could be short-lived if the international community sees the agreement as an end in itself. Long-term mobilization is required if the glimmer of hope born in Abuja is to lead to a concrete prospect for peace in Darfur."

Russia's Energy Strategy

"Washington Accuses Moscow of Using its Energy for 'Political Ends'"
Stephane Dupont in right-of-center Les Echos (05/09): "The Americans are accusing the Russians of wanting to keep their hold on former Soviet block nations through their energy policy and point to Putin's authoritarian excesses. America's accusations have triggered Moscow's anger. The first to the draw was Vice President Cheney while in Vilnius. But President Bush added a layer in an interview with the German daily, Bild. Tomorrow, in a very much-awaited speech, Putin will probably answer his accusers in the hopes of quelling the controversy, in the interest of Moscow, but also of other western capitals two months before the G-8 hosted by the Russian President." STAPLETON